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THE BIRDS OF BANDA NEIRA, MOLUCCAS, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on data gathered during a vertebrate survey of Banda Neira Island in September 1992. A total of 28 species of bird were recorded for the island some of which represent new island and/or Archipelago records. The local distribution, abundance and habitat preferences found for each species are described.

INTRODUCTION

Banda Neira is a small volcanic island, situated within the Banda Islands, about 160 km southeast of Ambon in 4°31'S, 129°50'E, Maluku Province, Indonesia. It is about 5 km long and 1.5 km wide and rises in the centre to about 200 m. The island group is dominated by the active volcano Gunung Api, rising to 650 m. (Figure 1).

From as early as the 6th Century until the late 18th Century the Banda Islands were the principle source of the valuable nutmeg and mace, the kernel and pit-covering of a fruit that is endemic to the region. Despite its long history of settlement the avifauna of these tiny islands has been poorly investigated. The aim of our work was to document the avifauna of Banda Neira. The island was visited from 23–29 May 1992. Additional information was collated from the Museum Zoologicum Bogoriense collection, and from *The*

Birds of Wallacea (White and Bruce 1986).

Five major habitat types were recognised.

1. *Marine*. Includes coastal seas and straits between islands.
2. *Coasts*. Includes, rocky sandy and coral beaches.
3. *Cultivated areas*. These include nutmeg and clove orchards and vegetable and village gardens.
4. *Airstrip* and associated rank grassland bordering the airstrip.
5. *Rainforest patches*. Small patches of closed forest and scrub occur along some creeks and on steep slopes and hilltops.

ANNOTATED SPECIES LIST

Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus* – Ten on the water and flying east of Hatta Island ca 4°34'S, 130°15'E.

Greater Frigatebird *Fregata minor* –

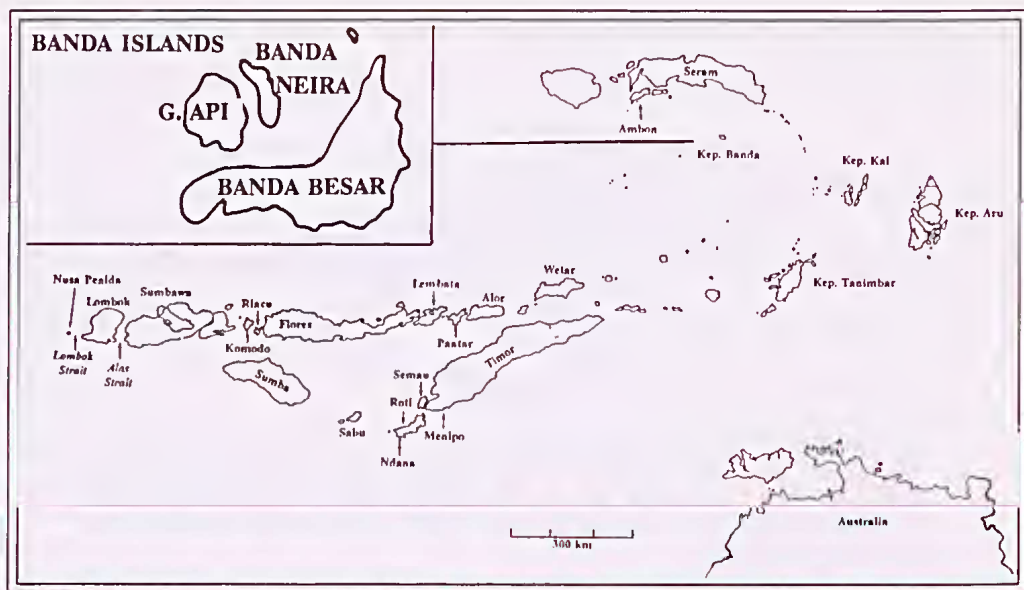


Figure 1. Map of Nusa Tenggara (Lesser Sundas) and Moluccas, Indonesia, showing Banda Islands.

Four males and one female near Hatta Island on 30 September.

Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* – A group of over 30 near Hatta Island and 5 further east in the Banda Sea on 30 September.

Pied Heron *Ardea picata* – One feeding in grass edge of airstrip on 23 and 24 September. Status unknown. First record of this species for the Banda Islands. There is a small breeding population of this species on Sulawesi (White and Bruce, 1986) but it is more likely a vagrant from Australia.

Reef Egret *Egretta sacra* – A white phase bird on a sandy beach on 23 September. First record of this species for the Banda Islands.

Rufous Night Heron *Nycticorax caledonicus* – One over gardens on 28 September.

Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus* – A small bird similar in size and coloration to *A. f. didimus* of north-

western Australia was observed twice in canopy of forest and twice on a stick nest in a huge tree at edge of forest. It appeared to be incubating or brooding and called frequently from the nest. The first record for the Banda Islands.

Spotted Kestrel *Falco moluccensis* – One near airstrip on 23 September. The first record for the Banda Islands.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* – Four edge of airstrip on 23 September. A passage migrant or winter visitor from the Palaearctic region.

Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus* – Two in low grass edge of airstrip on 23 September, one on 24 and one on 26 September. A passage migrant to and from Australia. The first record for the Banda Islands.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* – Moderately common. Ones, twos and small groups (up to 4). Airstrip, sandy and rocky beaches. Passage migrant and winter visitor from the

Palaearctic region.

Little Curlew *Numenius minutus* – Two in low grass edge of airstrip on 26 September. The first record for Banda Neira. Passage migrant to Australia.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus variegatus* – Two on beach and another calling on 24 September. A passage migrant and winter visitor from the Palaearctic region.

Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* – Flock of 40 in Banda Sea ca 15 km east of Hatta Island on 30 September. Status in the region uncertain.

Great Crested Tern *Sterna bergii* – Flock of 20 in Banda Sea ca 15 km east of Hatta Island. Status in the region uncertain.

Blue-tailed Imperial Pigeon *Ducula concinna* – Common in small flocks (up to 10). Loud growling 'bull warr' and 'wooo' calls heard frequently in forest areas. Aerial displays observed, with one bird in steep upward flight to 40–50 m above forest and glide, usually circular, sometimes straight descent with spread wings and tail. Breeding in September, nest with fresh egg found in rainforest. Egg measured 50.1 x 33.7 mm. Crop of one bird contained 3 fleshy nutmegs. Our single male specimen is smaller (length 485 mm, weight 500 g, wing 275 mm) than a specimen from Kai Islands (length 495, weight 710 g, wing 281 mm) and is greyer on the head, neck and underparts than Kai specimens.

Yellow-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua sulphurea* – One in forest on north end of island on 25 September and two over cultivated areas and at edge of forest on 28 September. Judged to be *sulphurea* rather than *galerita* on their small size. Probably vagrants or feral escapees, *sulphurea* occurs in

Sulawesi and the Lesser Sunda Is. and *galerita* on Ambon, Seram and Kai Is. also New Guinea and Australia. Both species are traded throughout Indonesia.

Eclectus Parrot *Eclectus roratus* – A male in cultivated area near airstrip and later two flying and calling near same place on 29 September. Possibly feral escapees.

Uniform Swiftlet *Aerodramus vanikorensis* – Common. Small flocks (up to 20) occasionally larger flocks (up to 200) mainly over airstrip and gardens.

Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta* – Five circling the airstrip on 24 September and 3 over gardens on 26 September.

Collared Kingfisher *Halcyon chloris* – Common. Coastal and cultivated areas and occasionally in forest. Breeding: nest with 3 fresh eggs in a termite mound 8 m up in the fork of a nutmeg tree. The three eggs measured 31.7 x 25.1 mm, 30.2 x 24.9 mm and 30.1 x 24.6 mm.

Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* – One in edge of forest on 28 September.

Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica* – Four over airport on 23 September, groups of 3 and 4 over beach on 24 and 25 of September. First record for the Banda Islands.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* – Flock of 20 feeding on edge of airstrip and in cultivated areas on 24, 25 and 28 September. Several of the birds were in breeding plumage. Winter visitor from the Palaearctic.

Rufous Fantail *Rhipidura rufifrons* – Moderately common. Mainly vine forest and scrub, also nutmeg and clove plantations and coconut and banana groves. Breeding: a nest with 2 feathered chicks (weight of chicks

4.8 and 4.2 g) found on 25 September; nest with 2 hatchlings (weight 0.8 g) and another with 2 feathered chicks (weight 8.4 g) found on 26 September; and nest with 2 fresh eggs found on 29 September.

Pachycephala phaionotus Island Whistler – Moderately common. Mainly forest and scrub, also nutmeg and clove plantations. Breeding: nest with 2 eggs found on 24 and another on 26 September.

Lemon-bellied White-eye *Zosterops chloris* – Common. Mainly in small flocks favouring forest and cultivated areas. Breeding: nests with eggs, hatchlings and feathered chicks found in September.

Scarlet Honeyeater *Myzomela sanguinolenta* – Common. Ones and twos. Mainly forest and cultivated areas. Breeding: nests with hatchlings and heavily incubated eggs found in September.

DISCUSSION

Although the survey was short we were able to cover the entire island and feel that most of the resident species were recorded, namely: Blue-tailed Imperial Pigeon, Collared Kingfisher, Rufous Fantail, Island Whistler, Lemon-bellied White-eye and Scarlet Honeyeater, all of which were found breeding. The Great Frigatebird and Red-footed Booby are both resident in the Banda Sea region. The remainder of the avifauna is made up largely of migrants or occasional visitors e.g. the Grey Plover, Oriental Plover, Common Sandpiper, Little Curlew, Whimbrel and Yellow Wagtail, all of which are nonbreeding winter visitors from the Palaearctic; the Wedge-tailed Shearwater is a migrant from the

Pacific or Indian Ocean; and the Pied Heron a vagrant from Australia.

White and Bruce (1986) list a further 28 species for the Banda Islands not recorded by us on Neira namely: Cape Petrel *Daption capense*, Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*, Variable Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae*, Orange-footed Scrubfowl *Megapodius reinwardt*, Comb-crested Jacana *Irediparra gallinacea*, Masked Lapwing *Hoplopterus miles*, Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*, Rufous-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*, Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes*, Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*, Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*, Wallace's Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus wallacii*, Rose-crowned Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus regina*, Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus*, Australian Koel *Eudynamys cyanocephala*, Sacred Kingfisher *Halcyon sancta*, Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, Elegant Pitta *Pitta elegans*, Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*, Kai Cicadabird *Coracina dispar*, Island Monarch *Monarcha cinerascens* and Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*. Many of these are migrants from the Palaearctic and Australia and no doubt could occur on Banda Neira from time to time.

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